

**New downtown
cafe offers
oasis of
tranquility
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Allegrone wraps up redevelopment of Onota Building

Downtown landmark makes transition from office space to upscale rental apartments

BY JOHN TOWNES

The Onota Building, a familiar commercial landmark in the streetscape of downtown Pittsfield, has reopened after a major renovation with a new identity as Onota 74 Residences.

The six-story, 55,000-square-foot building at 74 North St. was originally constructed in 1928 on the site of an old Baptist Church. For most of its history it was

"It was a total redevelopment in which every square foot was renovated."

an office building, with storefronts on the street level.

In its new incarnation, the storefronts remain and have been expanded. However, the upper floors have been

converted from office space into 25 upscale market-rate rental apartments.

The \$9 million project was undertaken by Allegrone Companies, which acquired the building in 2011. Allegrone Companies is a Lenox-based group of family-owned businesses that include construction, real estate, custom home building and masonry divisions (see related story on page 16).

The redevelopment project was funded as a public-private initiative. The requirements included preservation of its original external architectural features.

The interior was totally stripped down, redesigned and rebuilt. New energy-efficient and green technologies were also incorporated into the building.

"It was a total redevelopment in which every square foot was renovated," said Louis

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Hot glass at Ozzie's



With torch blazing in the background, Michael Ozner demonstrates some of his glass-blowing techniques at his studio on Pleasant Street (Route 102) in South Lee.

Longtime artist achieves goal of combined gallery/studio

BY BRAD JOHNSON

Ever since his first introduction to the art of glass blowing at the age of 16, Michael Ozner has been hooked.

"I felt such a strong connection to it," said the now 36-year-old resident of Becket. "It was the first thing that really inspired me and captured my interest."

In the years since then, Ozner has pursued his passion and honed his skills in a variety of settings and studios – including the one he set up in his rural home, which he purchased specifically because it matched his needs for a glass-blowing workshop.

While able to make a living selling his glasswork to wholesale clients and to retail customers at craft shows and other venues, Ozner also

dreamed of having a more permanent showcase for his work – a place that could serve as both a gallery for retail sales and a studio for on-site production and live demonstrations of glass-blowing techniques.

"I had wanted my own gallery for a long time," said Ozner, noting that the ideal location would be "on a busy road, a place I could afford, and where I would be allowed to blow glass."

That dream finally came to full realization this summer with the opening of Ozzie's Glass Gallery at 1670 Pleasant St. (Route 102) in South Lee. There Ozner (whose lifelong nickname is "Ozzie") has set up a bright and attractive showroom featuring a wide range of his work – from ear rings, pendants and other jewelry

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ON THE *job*



Spin instructor Aimee Sinopoli has expanded her Adams business beyond its cycling roots to include a wide range of fitness programs for all ages. Among these are martial arts classes led by her husband, David. The couple are joined here by their son, Brandon, alongside the boxing ring at Cutting Edge Fitness.

BEYOND SPIN TO CUTTING EDGE

Adams business grows into multifaceted fitness facility with programs for all ages

BY BRAD JOHNSON

Someone said to be spinning their wheels is, idiomatically, putting in lots of effort without really accomplishing anything. For Aimee Sinopoli, however, spinning wheels are a clear sign of forward progress for her clients and her business.

Sinopoli is the owner of Cutting Edge Fitness & Martial Arts Center in Adams, which has become the go-to place in northern Berkshire County for popular indoor cycling – or "spin" – classes involving the use of compact stationary equipment with a weighted flywheel that provides varying levels of pedaling resistance.

The business has also grown well be-

yond its cycling origins into a multifaceted fitness facility with programs and classes for all ages.

While indoor cycling is something that has long been done by individuals either with their own home equipment or at their

"We had a lot more room to work with, and began looking at ways to put it to use."

local fitness facility, the concept of group indoor cycling classes is still relatively new – offering a more engaging and motivational alternative to grinding through a lone workout.

"It's a fitness class where we're in charge of providing the fitness workout and coordinating the music," said Sinopoli. "People like it because it's a way for them to feel more

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The upper five floors of the Onota Building have been converted into 25 upscale one- and two-bedroom apartments, known as Onota 74 Residences. The street-level space is being leased for commercial use.

Onota Building
continued from page 1

Allegrone, principal of Allegrone Companies. “All that has remained is the original structure and shell and the historic features. Everything else is new.”

Allegrone marked the completion of the construction project with an open house in

late October. It is slated to open for occupancy in mid-November.

The apartments in Onota 74 include 10 one-bedroom units and 15 two-bedroom units, ranging from 800 to 1,400 square feet. They are renting for \$1,100 to \$1,500 depending on size and other characteristics, such as location within the building and the views. “The upper floors have spectacular views,” noted Allegrone.

One of the features at Onota 74 is a newly created rooftop deck, which is available for all tenants to use. “That’s a great spot, and an important amenity in the warmer months,” said Allegrone.

Arrangements have been made for designated parking spaces for tenants in the nearby McKay Street parking lot.

The Onota Building, which is on the corner of North and School streets, also contains five street-level storefronts. These include a large space directly on North Street and four others along School Street (a one-way sidestreet that connects North and Allen streets near City Hall and the Pittsfield Police headquarters).

Allegrone said those commercial spaces do not have tenants yet, but negotiations are in progress with some prospects.

He said their goal is to include a restaurant as an anchor tenant in the large North Street space, and shops or other consumer-oriented businesses in the others.

“Downtown needs more eateries and other attractions that will draw people, and that will be our priority for those spaces,” he said.

Phase Two

Onota 74 is the second phase of a combined \$14 million initiative by Allegrone Companies that also included the redevelopment of the Howard Building, a three-story structure on the corner of First and Fenn streets (two blocks east of Onota 74).

Both projects are based on a similar concept and goal of preserving and redeveloping historic structures to create new market-rate rental housing and street-level commercial space in the city center.

They received comparable public funding packages through historic preservation and housing development programs.

In 2014, Allegrone opened the redeveloped Howard Building, which is also a mixed-use building with street-level storefronts and 14 market rate rental apartments on the upper two floors.

“We handled the Howard and Onota separately, but we also see them as two aspects of one combined project,” said Allegrone. “The Howard Building is smaller, and we did that first to test the market before starting construction on the Onota Building.”

The two projects were among the first in the state to receive partial funding through

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Interior view of an apartment in the newly redeveloped Onota Building. (Allegrone Companies photo)

a new Housing Development Incentive Program (HDIP) from the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development.

HDIP provides tax credits to support construction of new market-rate housing in urban centers. The HDIP program’s goal is to increase the diversity of housing to stimulate overall economic development and neighborhood stability in designated “Gateway” cities such a Pittsfield, which are working to revitalize their economies and communities. The Onota received \$800,000 in HDIP tax credits.

The state program also calls for support from local government. The City of Pittsfield provided that through a new tax incremental exemption. That agreement provides complete city tax relief on the residential value of the property in the first year, with taxes phased in annually by 10 percent, until reaching 100 percent in 10 years.

In addition, the Onota Building, which is listed on the National Register of History Places, received historic tax credits of \$4 million.

Despite the economic difficulties and population declines Pittsfield has experienced, Allegrone said his company felt confident in making a substantial investment in downtown market-rate housing for several reasons.

“The city had done studies, and we also did our own study of the market,” he said. “They indicated that there is a need for all types of rental housing in the city, including more options in the higher end of the market.”

While acknowledging that there is also a need for more moderately priced rental housing throughout the city, Allegrone said the availability of market-rate housing, such as the Howard Building and Onota 74, can be an important element of overall revitalization.

“All sections of Pittsfield are important, and there need to be initiatives for all types of housing,” he said. “However, to have a vibrant community, it’s important to have a full-time downtown with people living there to stimulate more business and activity. That requires diverse housing options.”

He said that the demand for market-rate housing includes a mix of younger professionals and older residents who are downsizing from single-family homes when their families have grown.

“There is also a trend of people wanting to live in urban centers for the convenience and the activity,” he continued. “So we took a leap of faith that people will want to come.”

Allegrone said the response to the two projects has justified that faith. “We’ve already seen that with the Howard, and now we’re seeing it in the Onota,” he said.

The Howard Building filled up and had a waiting list within two weeks of when it opened. The Onota had pre-leased 75 percent of its units by late October, and it is expected to quickly reach full occupancy when it formally opens in November.

Allegrone added that, while the apartments in the two buildings are very contemporary and have similar modern amenities, they complement each other and offer alternatives within their category.

“Each has a different design flair based on their historic features and characteristics, which we incorporated into the units,” he said. “The Howard apartments have more of a loft style. The Onota is more industrial.”

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